Women and War

By KATE DEVEREUX BLAKE.

It is said by the ignorant that women should not vote because they cannot bear arms when the nation is at war. In reply the following facts are submitted:

Women were originally, and still are exempted from fighting not because of inability, but because their function of motherhood renders them too valuable to the race to permit them to be wasted in war. When driven to a last stand the women of savage or semi-civilized people fight side by side with the men of their tribe and with equal ferocity. But "woman's chief business is mothering," and interference with this business means the destruction of the race. The soldier may give his life to destroy the life of an enemy, but the mother faces death in order to bestow life. This is the higher duty.

Women bear the burden of war. Every able bodied man taken from farm or factory leaves his work for the women to do. This is clearly shown in European countries where the women are now working in the fields and in the mines. On August 7th, 1914, Premier Viviani issued an appeal to the women of France asking them to do the work of gathering the crops that had been left unfinished by men who had been called to arms, and also to prepare for the harvests of next year.

Man's ability to bear arms has no relation to his right to vote. The puniest, weakest, feeblest man goes unchallenged to the ballot box. A large majority of the men who appear before a recruiting sergeant are rejected as physically unfit, yet all may vote. Justice then demands that women should not be disfranchised because of weakness.

But the best answer is that war belongs to barbaric ages and conditions and should have no consideration in the government of civilized nations.

The United States Government spends 63 cents of every dollar of the total yearly budget for wars, past, present, and to come, leaving but 37 cents for all useful purposes. Of this balance, 5 cents goes for improving rivers and harbors, 4 cents for the Department of Agriculture, 3 cents for the Panama Canal, one fiftieth of a cent for the Children's Bureau, and about the same amount for the Bureau of Education. Women do not consider children less valuable and less important than hogs and fish. Women want to have their children educated. In time of war the schools are closed. When the United States occupied Vera Cruz the Marines used the schools for barracks. It has been officially announced that the schools of London and Berlin would be used as hospitals as soon as the need arose.

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In the recent Balkan War, all that was accomplished was the transfer to three of the warring nations of 47,300 square miles of territory, less than one third of the size of the State of Montana, and this was achieved by the sacrifice of 450,000 men, either killed or permanently disabled, at a cost estimated at from $1,250,000,000 to $1,500,000,000. This is an estimate of the actual military expenditure. It takes no note of the terrific destruction of economic values, which runs into billions of dollars and the interference with commerce, industry and agriculture. Nor does it count the frightful increase in the military expenditures of all the great powers of Europe in order to maintain an armed neutrality. Nor does it count the cost of the loss of the labor of the young men of France for whom the three years military service was re-established. And all this waste and destruction merely to prepare for the horrible conflict now devastating Europe.

No tinsel of trumpets and flags will ultimately seduce women into the insanity of recklessly destroying life, or gild the wilful taking of life with any other name than that of murder, whether it be the slaughter of the million or of the unit.

There are no longer any foreign wars on which we may look with calmness because they do not touch us. Half a million men in the United States earn their living in the production of goods for Great Britain. War means the destruction of their occupation. When this European war was only a few days old, factories were closed and men thrown out of work all over the United States.

Is it not time that the women of the land who value men's lives more dearly than they themselves do, should be permitted a voice in the government, so that the gigantic folly and stupidity of war may end, and the money now wasted in military operations may be spent on education and works for the comfort of humanity!

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